



For immediate release

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Quarantine Times for County Residents to Remain Unchanged

Helena – Based on current trends, Lewis and Clark Public Health is not reducing COVID-19 quarantine times for residents in the county from the current CDC-recommended 14 days.

Several weeks ago, the Centers for Disease Control released new options outlining specific situations which would allow state and local health departments to reduce quarantine times for individuals considered a close contact to an individual with COVID-19. The options hinged on several criteria being met, including ensuring there is no undue burden on testing capabilities, and the ability of health departments to provide comprehensive contact tracing of those infected.

Due to an overwhelming number of new cases in the community, Lewis and Clark Public Health is unable to provide comprehensive contact tracing and, therefore, will offer no changes to the current 14-day quarantine period.

“The new options from the CDC come with a number of caveats,” said Drenda Niemann, Health Officer for Lewis and Clark Public Health. “Right now, our community is not meeting many of the benchmarks required to consider lowering quarantine times,” she added. “If we get our numbers down and the health department can resume normal, comprehensive contact tracing, then we might be able to look into the new CDC recommendations in the future. Right now, we’re not even close.”

Lowering quarantine times could increase the number of cases in the community. According to CDC documentation, a reduction from 14 to 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) would increase the residual post-quarantine transmission risk by about 1 percent with an upper limit of about 10 percent. Under CDC’s other option, which reduces the quarantine period from 14 to 7 days, with proof of a negative diagnostic test, the risk of post quarantine transmission is even greater at 5% with an upper limit of 12%. Those numbers could add up to hundreds of additional cases in the community, which would likely not appear under the standard 14-day quarantine.

“As long as we are in a situation where we can’t effectively trace and monitor our local contacts, we would have no way to limit such potential for increased disease in our community, which is simply unacceptable at this time,” Niemann said.

“LCPH understands how long and difficult this pandemic has become for members of the community,” she added. “The health department knows the impact from the standard 14-day quarantine time, however, with consideration for our extremely high local disease rates, we feel compelled to stick with the CDC’s recommended and most protective quarantine period strategy of 14 days.”

It is especially important the community step up compliance with case-related quarantine and isolation requirements as well as those proven public health strategies that we have all come to know so well—masking, physical distancing, avoiding unnecessary gatherings, and staying home when sick.

COVID-19 symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus and include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Also, be aware of emergency warning signs of severe COVID-19 disease. Individuals showing any of the following signs or symptoms should seek emergency medical care immediately: trouble breathing, persistent pressure or pain in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or bluish lips or face coloring.

For the most current available data on local COVID-19 cases, view the Local COVID-19 Decision Making Dashboard at www.lccountymt.gov/health/covid-19/local-covid-19-decision-making-dashboard.html.

Preventing and controlling local COVID-19 is dependent on personal responsibility and individual choices that residents of our county can make to protect our community. Lewis and Clark Public Health continues to urge people to do the right thing to protect our community, practice what has been learned over the last several months, such as physical distancing, wearing a face covering, avoiding gatherings, washing hands, and sanitizing surfaces to protect ourselves and others.

If you have questions, please call Lewis and Clark Public Health at 457-8900.

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